



Youth Builds a Future on City's Vibrant Past

Fundación para la Capacitación Integral Angostura

No. 19

Over 370 miles southeast of bustling Caracas, and a world apart, Ciudad Bolívar evokes its exceptional past. As the country's interim capital, the site of the first Venezuelan congress, and the operational base for Simón Bolívar's independence movement, the city played a central role in Venezuelan history. Today, pastel colonial structures flanking the shady central plaza and scattered along other streets are reminders of this rich heritage.

Unfortunately, since its designation as a national historic monument in 1976, Ciudad Bolívar has lost some of its aesthetic appeal. Buildings distinguished by their unique Caribbean-influenced colonial architecture have begun to crumble. Moreover, residents of Ciudad Bolívar have had to confront serious social problems in recent years, including chronic unemployment, underemployment and alarming school drop-out rates among the city's youth (30 percent of those between 15 and 24 were neither working nor studying in 1996). Like the rest of the country, with half the population under 20 years old, Ciudad Bolívar is disproportionately youthful. Investment in job training and education is essential to developing this human capital.

BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE BY RESTORING ARCHITECTURAL TREASURES



Photo: Courtesy of Fundación Angostura

Júnior Villalba, a participant in the Fundación Angostura program, works on the model low-cost house.

In 1998, the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) and Deltaven, an affiliate of Venezuela's national petroleum company Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA), signed an agreement to donate \$147,000 and \$145,000, respectively, over three years, to the Fundación para la Capacitación Integral Angostura (Fundación Angostura), a nongovernmental organization that provides training, technical assistance and employment opportunities to low-income youth in Ciudad Bolívar and surrounding areas. Fundación Angostura contributed \$44,000 of its own funds to the project and leveraged an additional \$159,000 from the state of Bolívar and the municipality of Heres, under whose jurisdiction Ciudad Bolívar falls, to launch its project *La Escuela Taller para Jóvenes Desocupados del Municipio Heres* [Workshop for Unemployed Youth from the Municipality of Heres] (VZ-162).

The objectives were twofold: to address the occupational and educational disadvantages plaguing Ciudad Bolívar's adolescents as well as to reverse the degradation of the city's cultural patrimony by training program participants in architectural restoration and preservation, among other skills. Fundación Angostura hoped that arming young people with the necessary tools to compete successfully for the limited local jobs available would also generate an intangible benefit for them: the sense that they could control their own future.

TRAINING APPLIED

During the course of the 40-month project

- 18 young women successfully completed 500 training hours in tourism and hospitality;
- 104 young adults studied masonry, blacksmithing, carpentry and electrical systems;
- 18 students simultaneously pursued college degrees at night; and
- all students participated in discussions on health and personal development.

Of the 104 young adults learning trades,

- all took an additional specialized course in traditional construction techniques (such as use of cane and mud walls, straw and earth adobe, and lime and cement adobe) and applied them to building a model low-cost house over a six-month period;
- the 21 carpentry students built furniture for the model house and, along with student blacksmiths, sold other hand-made furniture at several markets and events;
- 64 student masons partially restored two historic buildings by applying traditional construction techniques, installing modern amenities such as bathrooms and electrical wiring, and repairing roofs and interior walls;
- 14 student electricians connected to the main power line the student blacksmiths' replica of an antique street lamp donated by Fundación Angostura to the city for its 237th anniversary, lighting a street that had been dark for 25 years;
- student electricians and masons participated in professional internships arranged by Fundación Angostura; and
- 33 metalworking and carpentry students worked on the renovation of the city's main cathedral.

Currently 85 percent of program graduates are employed (73 percent are self-employed, and 12 percent are working with the private and public sectors).

LESSONS LEARNED

Fundación Angostura developed mechanisms for retaining a high percentage of its students during the mandatory three years of program participation.

These strategies included

- thoroughly screening potential participants and their families to determine candidates' weaknesses and strengths as well as to evaluate psychological maturity, socio-economic situation and particular interests;
- involving families in the project;
- recognizing accomplishments;
- offering students insurance, food, transportation, uniforms, educational and recreational outings, special lectures, materials and the use of tools for day labor, and, in some cases, pay; and
- shortening courses when appropriate and making them as practical as possible.

A COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE

Fundación Angostura will bring workshop graduates together periodically to discuss their experiences in the labor market and how their training has affected them. In addition, a new three-month training course—a scaled-down replica of the project funded by IAF and Deltaven—has attracted more than 300 participants. While the local job market remains highly competitive and there is no assurance of new funding for programs addressing the issue, Fundación Angostura's efforts represent positive steps toward preserving Ciudad Bolívar's heritage and salvaging a future for its youth.

Data cited herein were compiled by Fundación Angostura and independently verified.

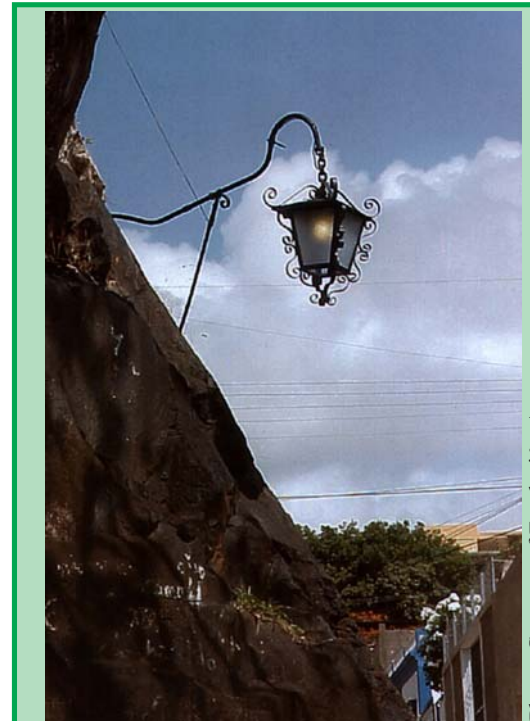


Photo: Courtesy of Fundación Angostura

Student blacksmiths created this replica of an antique street lamp which now lights up a street opened in 1919.

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